

# THE SOKOTO CALIPHATE

A Consideration of its Economic  
Philosophy and Policies

**Ibraheem Sulaiman**  
**Formally Director Centre for Islamic Legal Studies**  
**Ahmadu Bello University**

Paper presented to the International Seminar  
on Islamic Economics, February 11—16, 1985,  
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In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

## **I. THE IMPERATIVE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE**

Sokoto Caliphate came into being as a result of the Islamic revolution in the process of which started in 1774 and culminated in Allah 'perfecting the victory for Muslims' with the fall of Alkalawa in 1808. The Caliphate as thus a revolutionary state, Determined to establish the Shariah as the supreme law of the land. Install upright and just rulers over the affairs of Muslims in place of correct and genuinely inept rulers of the Days of Ignorance, and to establish justice in society. The long process through which the revolution was effected made it possible for the people to see with their own eyes the differences that there were, in the system of government, in the economic and social system and in the legal order, between an Islamic government, which the Sokoto Caliphate represented, on the other hand, and the un-Islamic government on the other. This revolutionary experience also gave rise to certain principles articulated so well as well by the leaders of the revolution.

These principles, as far as we are concerned, are of particular importance to us in the contemporary Nigeria for the simple fact that our system of government, our legal system and our economic system

are fundamentally similar to those which Bawa, or Yunfa or indeed the much earlier Sunni AH operated. They all operated on similar principles and exhibit similar characteristics, for they all are nourished by one source: unbelief, or at best, secularism. This is how Shehu Usman described the governments of his days, as in his Kitab al—Farg:

I say – and help is with God – indeed the intention of the unbelievers in their governments is only the fulfillment of their lusts, for they are like the beats...one of the ways of their government is succession to the emirate by hereditary right and by force to the exclusion of consultation. And one of the ways their government is the building of their sovereignty upon three things: the people's persons, their honour and their possession; and whomsoever they wish to kill or exile or violate his honour or devour his wealth they do so in pursuit of

their lusts, without any right in  
the Shari'ah.

The first principle, then, is that government derives its legitimacy among other things from two principal sources: first, its being installed and approved by the people, and secondly, its ability to establish justice in society. This principle implies that there is an organic relationship between how a government comes into being and its ability - or willingness - to establish justice and make it permeate the whole society: a government by inheritance, a government installed by deceit and organised fraud, or a government that forces itself on the people, cannot but be unjust and despotic. The principle also implies, as Abdullahi states in Diya' al—Hukkam And echoed by Muhammad Bello in Ifadat al—Ikwan, that if a ruler finds himself incapable of establishing social justice in society he should resign voluntarily otherwise the people reserve the right in the Shariah to force him out of office. Finally, the principle also implies that any unjust government should be considered as an illegitimate government, irrespective of its composition.

This last point lies at the very foot of the Sokoto revolution, for the question then was: could a government headed by a Muslim be overthrown in a popular revolution on the grounds of oppression and injustice? The answer, as far as Shehu Usman was concerned, was in the affirmative, drawing inspiration from what Shaykh Abd al-Karim al-Maghili said concerning Sunni Ali of Songhai. This ruler we are told in Ajwibat al-Maghili, ‘made lawful the blood and property of the Muslims and killed scholars, jurists and priests, women and infants and others’. In addition, ‘he seized property, enslaved from women and sold free men to an extent that cannot be measured’. Furthermore, Sunni Ali permitted his governors to impose unjust and un-Islamic taxes on the people, and to indulge in plundering and pillaging of Muslim property. Al-Maghili’s judgment of Sunni Ali runs thus: ‘Sunni Ali and all his supporters and followers and partisans are no doubt among the most unjust oppressors and miscreants who cut asunder what God has ordained to be joined and commit mischief in the land’. Al-Maghili said further: ‘So the Jihad of the amir Askia (Muhammad) against them and his seizing power from their hands is one of the most worthy and important of Jihads’.

The second principle articulated by Sokoto leaders is that one of the manifestations of an unjust and despotic government is the imposition of all forms of heavy and illegal taxes on common people. Of course taxes provide unlimited excuses for the confiscation and plundering of the property of poor people and the violation of their privacy and their honour. Added to this is the fact that un—Islamic governments extract heavy taxes on people who could least afford them, without fulfilling their own corresponding obligation to cater for the well—being of the people. This feature of despotism is described thus by Shehu Usman in Kitab al—Farg:

One of the ways of their government is their imposing on the people monies not laid down by Shariah, being those which they call jangali, and kudin gari and kudin sala... one of the ways of their government is what the superintendent of the market takes from all the parties to a scale, and the meat which he takes on each market day from the butchers, and they call this tawasa... One of the ways their

government is to impose tax on  
merchants, and other travelers...  
One of the ways of their  
government is to shut the door in  
the face of the needy.

These are features of government that rules outside the framework of Islam, ruling by whims and caprices. But, as the third principle articulated in Sokoto indicates, such arbitrariness and naked oppression invariably leads to social disintegration. To the extent that oppression implies that one set of people imposes unbearable financial and social burden on other people, particularly the poor, in order to meet the demands of their own insatiable tastes for luxury and decadent pleasures, one set of people, in this some, pays for the pleasure of others — princes, governors, and the male and female prostitutes who live off them. It is the wealth extracted from the poor that pays for gambling, daily night parties and excessive prostitution that form the habit of those who govern. It also happens that this state of affairs invariably signals the end of a given political system. ‘When God desires to destroy a state’, as Shehu Usman puts it in Bayn Wujub al-Hijra, ‘He hands its affairs to extravagant sons of rulers



whose ambition is to magnify the status of kingship, to obtain their desire and indulge in sins. And God takes glory away from them as a result of that'. We only have to look at the last days of the kingdoms of central Bilad al-Sudan, to see why they fell on after the other to Shehu Usman's revolutionary armies.

In Kano, the government imposed as many as seventeen different taxes and levies on the poor people, all of which, as the Kano Chronicle aptly states, constitute naked robbery. These levies were essentially aimed at enabling the princes and government officials to sustain their luxurious and scandalous life—styles. In Borno, as Shaykh al-Barnawi indicated in his Shurb al—Zulal, people had to pay judges to obtain justice, pay the governor to gain his hearing, pay levies in the market, pay usury on loans and, what is more, suffer plunder and confiscation of their property in the hands of those in authority. In Katsina, the perfected luxury and what one writer calls decadent pleasures easily gave way to the wave of revolution. 'On the whole', said the anonymous author of Hikayat Gozu, quoted by Yusuf Bala Usman in his The Transformation of Katsina, 'what caused the government (of Katsina) to pass to the Fulani other than the rich men boasted of their houses (full) of gold and silver? Every rich man hi a

square house which they filled with gold and silver. And the result was that it was a city of vainglory'. He wrote further: 'And the kings tried to evade the consequences of this by giving wealth to the 'ulama and the 'ulama tried to evade the consequences by means of charms for fear of disorder and the killing of one another'.

Shehu Usman dan Fodio had this inevitable consequences of oppression and class distinction in mind when he sent this poignant message to Moddibo Adama, in what appears to be a letter of appointment of the latter as the Moddibo of Adamawa. 'I warn you', Shehu Usman said, as we read in Njeuma's Fulani Hegemony in Yola, 'to avoid oppression, wanton damage, spilling of blood without the sanction of law, and nepotism, because if you indulge in partiality and class distinction, your authority would be broken... and a destructive war would start'.

It follows, therefore, as another principle states, that nations and governments are ultimately sustained by justice. To the extent that presidents, governors, tax collectors and bureaucrats are invariably the agents of oppression, they thus constitute, when they are not upright, a potent danger to the stability of state. Muhammad Bello, the caliph in Sokoto, did not hide his suspicion of this category of

people. ‘So blessings on you, O dead man’, he quotes Khidr, that universal symbol of justice, ‘unless you were an amir, or a chief or a tax collector or a bureaucrat’. Statecraft, Muhammad Bello states further in Usul al—Siyasa, consists, in its entirety, of justice. ‘Al-adl’ as he puts it in Arabic, ‘huwa al-siyasa kulluha’. Proceeding further on this premise, Caliph Muhammad Bello says:

The Imam...should impose conditions on his administrators, above all, to be just. He must select from the best of his men and should look into their activities at all times. Asim b. Bahdala said, ‘Whenever Umar b. Khattab appointed an administrator, he stipulated that he should not ride an expensive horse, nor dress fashionably nor eat the best food, nor shut the door in the face of those seeking his help to obtain their needs and what may improve their lot’. ‘Umar used to say: ‘I do not appoint you with the authority to abuse their bodies, or their



honour, but I appoint you only to lead them in congregational prayers, establish justice among them, and distribute (state resources) on the basis of equity...’

‘Umar also wrote to his chief administrator, Abu Musa al—Ash’ari, saying, ‘The happiest of governors is he whose people are pleased with him, and the most unfortunate of governors is he whose people are miserable because of his rule, so beware of oppression. If your administrators follow in your footsteps and become like you, then they are like an animal in a green pasture which eats so much that it becomes fat. Its fatness is the reason for its destruction, for it is slaughtered for its fat and assigned (as food)’.

The caliph states further, ‘the imam... should order the people of his state to do justice and goodness and avoid tyranny among themselves, to love good and hate evil. The result will be that the character of the people and the administrators will be on the same plane as that of the ruler. If they act rightly in the sight of their Beneficent Master (i.e. Allah), He will inject mercy into the hearts of their rulers to do good to them. If they disobey their Lord and outrage the earth with corruption, God will inflict a penalty on them, and they and their rulers will be blamed, for the Almighty has said, “thus do We set some oppressors over others”.

Such is the over—riding importance of maintaining justice in society, in the conception current in the Sokoto Caliphate. But, as the final principle we shall examine states, this justice is clearly defined, and is firmly rooted in a given ideological and social framework: this is justice that flows from the universal application of the sharia, from political culture based entirely on Islamic principles, from social system inspired by Islamic norms and values. Government, law and social policies which are based on principles and considerations which conflict with the Sharia are seen in Sokoto as flowing from systems guided by lust and arbitrariness, rather by Islam and justice.

## II. STATE AND ECONOMY

The Islamic government, therefore, in contrast with the government of unbelievers, aim to establish comprehensive social justice in society, as well as a just and equitable social order. To this end, the poor and the dispossessed are, as a rule, the centre—piece of its economic and social policies. In the case of the Sokoto Caliphate, the following statements of its early leaders indicate the direction and orientation of its socio—economic policies.

Shehu Usman said in his Kitab a—Farq:

I say — and help is with God -  
the purpose of the Muslims in  
their government is to strip evil  
things from religious and  
temporal affairs, and introduce  
reforms into religious and  
temporal affairs.. .An  
example...is that the governor of  
every country shall strive to  
repair the mosques, and establish  
the five daily prayers in them,  
and order the people to read the  
Qur'an... and to acquire  
knowledge; and that he should



strive to reform the markets and  
set to rights the affairs of the  
poor...

Shehu Abdullahi wrote in Diya al-Hukkam:

...(The Imam) will then pay the  
allowances of the scholars, the  
judges, the prayer—callers and  
any person employed to take  
charge of anything of interest to  
the Muslims, such as the fighting  
men. After that, he will pay the  
indigents their allowance until he  
covers all of them, male and  
female, minors and adults, on the  
basis of the amount they need  
and the nature of their want. If  
the money is more than enough,  
the surplus shall be kept in the  
treasury for what may possibly  
occur in form of calamity; or for  
building mosques, or for freeing  
captives, or settling debts, or  
assisting bachelors to get  
married, or helping the pilgrims

or for any other purpose which may possibly arise.

And Caliph Muhammad Bello wrote in Usul al-siyasa:

The Imam...should provide public amenities for the people of his state for their temporal and religious benefits. For this purpose, he shall foster the artisans, and be concerned with tradesmen who are indispensable to the people, such as farmers and smiths, tailors and dyers, physicians and grocers, butchers and carpenters and all sorts of trades which contribute to (stabilize) the proper order of this world.

The ruler must allocate these tradesmen to every village and every locality. He should urge his people to seek foodstuff and keep it for future use. He must keep villages and country sides in prosperity, construct fortresses and bridges, maintain markets and roads and

realize for them all that are of public interest so that the proper order of this world may be maintained.

The realization of these objectives, as Shehu Usman and his companions realized, depended very much on the resources of the state, prudent management of those resources, as well as the integrity of the rulers. Now with regards this last point, Shehu Usman insists, by implication, in Bayan Wujub al—Hijra that it is preferable for rulers to take only the ‘ordinary man’s share’ as their salary from the state and live decent and simple life. In his Diya al—Wilayat, Shehu Abdullahi emphasized that government’s foremost duty is to enhance the general well—being of mankind and not to stifle people’s welfare by ‘usurping wealth and power from them’. In other words, government does not possess the right to dispossess and impoverish its own people — not matter the excuse.

Prudent and judicious management of state resources is what, according to Shehu Abdullahi, distinguishes an Islamic government from a despotic one. The caliph, he said time and again, in Diya al-Hukkam, in Diya al-Imam, in Diya al-Muqtadin and other works, enhances the State treasury through lawful means, and spends these resources as dictated by the Sharia. The despot, on the other hand,



fills the treasury through unjust and oppressive methods, and shares out the state resources indiscriminately and arbitrarily — as largesse, to enhance his own personal ambitions.

Since Sokoto government, under Shehu Usman — and later caliphs - Was a caliphate and not a despotism, prudence was the rule in the management of the State Treasury. Hence Shehu Usman's reiteration of this policy in Bayan Wujb al—Hijra:

Know that no Muslim should draw from the State treasury more than what he needs when the State Treasury contains no more sufficient for those who are entitled to it, as is the case of the present day. If a man takes more than what he is in need of, he must keep it aside for those who deserve it and then return it.

In the same way anyone who has sufficient for his basic needs without help from the State Treasury should take nothing from the treasury; (but if he does) he should keep it aside for those

who deserve it and return it...  
Everyone is to be given from the  
State Treasury sufficient to  
sustain hi for a year. He is not to  
be given more than that when the  
revenue of the State Treasury is  
not in excess of its expenditure;  
its expenditure is the amount  
spent on the Prophet's relatives  
and the concerns of the Muslims.

This brings us to the important question of taxation. It may be said from the outset that no economy can thrive without one form of taxation or the other; but at the same time, no economy can survive by excessive taxation and pauperization of the people. The guiding rule in respect of taxation has been settled by Muhammad Bello, in Al-Ghayth al-Wabl. Taxation, he said, should be based on a careful assessment of the resources and needs of an individual having regard to the prevailing economic situation against the overall need of the state, so as to establish an equitable balance between the purse of the individual citizen and the treasury of the state. 'For (tax) increase above the just amount is an injustice to the tax—payer', he said, 'and

its decrease below the just amount is an injustice to the treasury’.

Taxes accruing to the Sokoto Caliphate were as follows, as we read in al-Gayth al-Wabl of Caliph Muhammad Bello.

First, proceeds from Zakat, which, strictly, speaking, is not a tax, but an obligation which an individual Muslim owes to Allah. It is thus not imposed by the State, and does not therefore belong to the State as such: the proceeds belong, as Allah Himself has prescribed, to the Muslim Umma, for the promotion of its well-being and elimination of poverty. The Zakat funds are thus expended as is stated in the Qur’an on: the poor and the needy, and those who are in charge thereof, and those whose hearts are to be won over (to Islam), and for the freeing of human beings from bondage, and (for) those who are over-burdened with debts, and for every struggle in God’s cause, and (for) the wayfarer (Qur’an 9: 60). Zakat is thus the Islamic way of ensuring an equitable balance between those who have and those who do not have: the poor, needy or debtors do not pay Zakat, they receive proceeds from Zakat, as of right, to enhance their well—being, and to help them over from poverty and indebtedness to a life of decency and prosperity.

Second, proceeds from jizya, tax which is paid by non-Muslim citizens, for the protection they receive from the state, and in lieu of military service.

Thirdly, proceeds from ushr, a ten per cent levy on the merchandise non—Muslim foreigners, for the protection they receive from the Islamic State, in respect of their lives and property. The state reserves the right, as Caliph Muhammad Bello states, to waive this levy, but does not reserve the right to increase it beyond ten percent of the market value of their goods.

Fourth, proceeds from Kharaj, a tax payable on land which comes to the possession of the Islamic state by way of military conquest is paid by all, Muslims and non-Muslims, in accordance with the terms of the agreement reached.

In all, therefore, a citizen of the Islamic state pays only one of tax or two at the very extreme, with the majority of the people, those who live below the poverty line, nisab, paying nothing at all in most cases. For example, where a Muslim lives on a land subject to both Kharaj and zakat at one and at the same time, he p only the Zakat an Khar lapses. Says Muhammad Bello: ‘Abu Hanifa...said, The ‘ushr (zakat of farm produce) and Kharaj should not be taken together’. Moreover

Kharaj is not due at all on lands which have not been acquired by the military conquest. ‘Anything taken from them by way of land tax’, said Muhammad Bello, ‘is tyranny and there is no justification for it’. Beyond these four categories of taxes, any other levy or tax imposed on citizens is un-Islamic and an unjust exploitation of the people. said the Caliph: ‘As for the levies and tithes taken from the trade of the Muslims in the streets, other than Zakah, and what is taken at the time of sales of articles of merchandise...this is not a legitimate income of the Muslim treasury. On the contrary it is a specific customary ‘tax, and a clear injustice which the Shari’a does not permit and which ‘adl (justice) does not allow’.

Three things may be noted here in respect of taxation. In the first place, payment of tax - Zakat in the case of a Muslim — is, in the conception of Sokoto Caliphate, a fulfilment on the part of the citizen of one of his fundamental obligations to Allah; therefore, its payment and its collection are governed, as in all other Islamic obligations, by the noblest of virtues and ethics. Tax should, accordingly, be paid with dignity and collected with dignity. Government has no right to waylay people on the highways - with its functionaries playing the role of brigands — or to surprise people in their homes and violate

their privacies, or to harass and chase them in the markets or, much worse, to bundle them into jails, all in the name of taxation. All such practices are a manifestation of injustice, which, naturally, are considered responsible in Sokoto.

‘The payment of Zakat on money’, Shehu Abdullahi stated this Islamic policy, in Diya’ al—Hukkam, ‘is entrusted to the sincerity of the owners. Therefore, the ruler and his deputies have no right to violate the privacy of people and search houses in order to collect it; nor do they have the right to put people on oath on account unless the people concerned are known to be evil doers’. Shehu Abdullahi, reiterating the legal limits of government, stated Further: ‘So whoever claims that his property is less than taxable Amount (nisab); or that he had already paid before the coming of the tax-collector; or that he has a large debt which renders the payment of Zakat ineligible, his word shall be accepted’.

Taxation, in the final analysis, is intended as a means of enhancing the well-being of the people, not an excuse to dispossess or impoverish them. Consequently, anything that is basic to life is not taxable, as far as Sokoto Caliphate is concerned. ‘It is not lawful’, Shehu Abdullahi, in agreement with Al-Maghili, wrote in Diya’ al-



Sultan, ‘to raise (tax) on the public utilities from which derive the general well-being (of the people) such as waters, pastures, roads and buildings open to the public for God did not grant that to any Sultan or any other person’. In other words, the state does not possess the right to levy taxes on whatever is fundamental to life, and basic to the well-being of man — such as health, food, clothing, source of energy and education, to add to the list of Shehu Abdullahi.

Similarly, taxation is intended, in the conception of Sokoto Caliphate, as a means of redistribution of wealth, from those who already have to those who do not have. The poor is, accordingly, a recipient of tax, not its payer; the rich is a payer of tax, not its recipient. Any taxation, which renders the poor poorer, or which takes the better part of a person’s lawful property is tyranny. The Prophet, peace be upon him, has made this principle clear. He said to Mu’adh, when the latter was appointed governor: “Tell them (the citizens of the State) that Allah has made Zakat obligatory upon them to be collected from those who are well-to-do among them and restored to the poor. The Prophet added: ‘When they submitted to this, be mindful not to take their best belongings for this purpose. Guard yourself against the complaint of the oppressed, for between that and Allah there is no barrier’. It is

perhaps the basis of this principle that all the leaders in Sokoto had been reluctant to permit the introduction of levies other than those specified in the Shari'a. Even where there seems to be a justification for additional levies — such as when a calamity engulfs the society, which Shehu Abdullahi defines as absolute threat to security of state — whatever levy imposed to avert the calamity should be considered as absolutely temporary, which must not in any circumstances be made permanent.

How does the individual fit into this economic scheme? The answer is to be found in Muhammad Bello's Ahkam al—Makasib - which perhaps is the definitive treatise on the economic philosophy of the caliphate, and in Shehu Abdullahi's Diya' al—Anam fi'l Halal wa'l Haram, which, among other things, sets out both the lawful means of livelihood as well as the unjust and unlawful methods of acquiring wealth. In his Ahkam al—Makasib, Caliph Muhammad Bello sets out the following principles:

1. Allah and His Messenger have explicitly commanded every Muslim to seek his own livelihood and to strive to be self-supporting. The means are varied and diverse: it is therefore left to the individual to find out the means conducive to his

aptitude and his ability, bearing in mind the prevailing circumstances. However, trade has been singled out for special praise.

2. Idleness or loafing is not permitted in Islam: the idle person, the caliph insists, does not only lose his own lawful portion in this world, he is also most likely to lose his portion in the Hereafter. He further states that Prophet 'Isa once met a person who was always in a state of worship, and asked him what his occupation was, to which the man replied, 'Worship'. 'Who then feeds you?', 'Isa asked, to which he received the reply, 'My brother'. 'Then', replied 'Isa, 'Your brother is more of a worshipper than you are'. The Caliph also quotes one of the sages, Abu Qalaba, as saying to a man: 'To see you striving at earning your livelihood is more pleasant to me than to see you in the corners of the mosque'. Furthermore, quoting Abu Sulayman al-Darani, the caliph insists " 'Worship for us is not to stand on your feet (in prayers) while other persons are having to feed you. Get your bread first, feed yourself and then worship'.

3. It follows therefore, that no one who has an occupation, and is gainfully employed, should abandon his occupation. 'The abandoning of gainful occupations for no good reason', the Caliph stresses, 'is something which is blameworthy in the Shari'a because the Prophet has said that, "God hates healthy persons who are idle"'. It would seem inconceivable in this scheme of things if not outrightly blasphemous, for a government to send those who are thus gainfully employed out of their jobs, or to dismiss them on whimsical grounds.
4. Begging, as an occupation, is prohibited. Nothing, by implication, that begging is no more than giving up one's personal integrity, and is thus, in reality, the meanest of all occupations, the caliph then says, 'He who sacrifices his honour by begging gets no substitute, even if he gets riches by so doing. If begging were to be compared with its gains, (the indignity of) begging would outweigh all the gains'.
5. Poverty, which often is the result of being without skill or occupation, is neither a desirable nor a commendable state to be in. Poverty, the caliph insists, invariably has the

following effects: it weakens one's religion, it reduces one's intelligence, and destroys one's sense of honour.

6. Consequently, the greatest asset for an individual is for him to have his dirham or wealth, to sustain his life, and his din, his religion, to safeguard his hereafter. In other words, religious life and economic pursuit are not mutually exclusive; they are rather mutually indispensable and complimentary - the one sustaining and reinforcing the other.

The thrust of Muhammad Bello's thoughts in Ahkam al—Makasib is that it was imperative for every individual person in the Caliphate to have an occupation of his own, to be self—supporting, to avoid depending on others through begging, and to live a life of decency and self—respect. In this regard, no occupation, other than begging or loafing, is mean: in fact, labour, in all respects, is altogether dignified and noble. 'Whoever adopts a humble occupation, even at the pain of his personal pride', the sage, Ibrahim Adham is quoted as saying, 'in order to earn lawful income, deserves paradise'. Similarly, the caliph adds, whoever strives to earn lawful income, in order to be self—supporting, and to maintain his own family and help neighbours

will meet Allah on the day of judgment in a happy mood. The individual citizen, then, does not only have a right to work: it is his obligation to have work and to earn lawful income. But earning is not without its philosophy or goals. The caliph, in accordance with the objectives of the Sokoto Caliphate, categorically earning into four. There is, first, the earning which is obligatory on every able citizen. It is the earning which is aimed at securing sufficient income to fulfil one's basic necessities of life – including maintaining a decent family — and to settle one's debts. Then, there is the earning which is commendable: this is to earn an income over and above the basic necessities of life, in order, says the caliph, 'to aid the poor and cement ties of relationship'. The basis of ... praying strive to alleviate the economic hardships of a widow or a poor person is as good as fighting in a jihad, or praying or fasting, as the Prophet has said. Above all, to earn sufficient income to help the dispossessed in society is of greater merit than to be engaged in non-obligatory worship since its benefits extends to other people while the benefit of worship is purely personal. Moreover, there is the fact that the Prophet said that the best of all people is he who is most beneficial to others. Then, there is the earning, which although is not encouraged by the



Sharia, is nevertheless permissible. It is, says the Caliph, the earning of an extra income - over and above what is needed to help the poor and cement the ties of relationship — with the aim to cover the cost of adornment, to make oneself presentable and to secure a comfortable life: even to the extent of ‘building a house and decorating it, buying furnishings and employing servants’. The Prophet, says the Caliph, in an attempt to find a basis for this attitude, has lauded lawful wealth in an upright hand. The Caliph, however, registers his reservation about this category of earning by stating that some scholars have disapproved of it because of the likelihood of its becoming a source of arrogance and oppression. Finally, there is the earning which is outrightly unlawful: this is the earning, says Muhammad Bello, which is pursued for the purpose of boastfulness, unhealthy competition in accumulation of wealth, vanity and oppression. In other words, there is a limit, if we may say so, beyond which accumulation of wealth in individual hand cannot be tolerated by the state, even if, as Muhammad Bello explains, such wealth is being earned through lawful means.

The individual, in this economic system, has a dual role to play: on the one hand, he is duty-bound to pursue his own well-being, take

adequate care of his family, and to make himself self—reliant and self—sustaining so as to preserve his own integrity; and on the other hand, he is expected to work harder and earn even more income in order to support his relations, to help widows, orphans and the poor, and above all to enhance the total well-being of society. He is, however, not expected, or permitted, to acquire and accumulate wealth for its own sake: to the extent that such inordinate devotion to wealth leads ultimately to materialism and hence to luxury, arrogance, human exploitation and tyranny, to that extent, the state reserves the right to put a check on wealth accumulation, in order to restore a healthy balance in society, and preserve its social cohesion. Whatever be the rule of the individual in the economy, the fact however remains that the state is the ultimate guarantor and the dominant agency for economic and social development. To that extent, the state is duty—bound, as far as the conception in Sokoto Caliphate is concerned, not only to inspire economic activities, but also to plan, co—ordinate and supervise economic activities, and to intervene to restore economic balance in society, where this is being disturbed.

Here, Caliph Muhammad Bello, in his Ahkam al—Mahasib, has formulated what appears to be a unique — and indeed original — concept of political economy. Jihad, he says, is the best means of earning, because of the universal and all-embracing nature of its benefits: jihad opens lawful economic resources for Muslims; it enables Muslims to ward off the mischief of non—Muslims, and finally, it enables Muslims to put off the fire of non-Muslim powers.

The implications of this policy can be summarized as follows:

First: It is in the economic interest of a given nation — Sokoto Caliphate in this case — to expand its frontiers, and to seek to control through both political and military means as much territories, and thus as much human and natural resources, as possible.

Second: Total and absolute sovereignty is imperative for economic development; therefore, it is essential for a state to seek to preserve and

strengthen its ideology, and to weaken other opposing ideologies to the best of its ability.

Third: Peace is indispensable to economic development and prosperity; consequently, the state must strive not only to defend itself against all potential enemies, but also to seize the initiative to put off the enemy fire of war and keep the state safe and secure.

The Sokoto dispensation especially under Muhammad Bello, pursued this jihad policy vigorously. Since the preservation and consolidation of Islam was the foremost concern of the state, all economic policies — and indeed all political and social policies — were geared towards that end. Everything revolved around the enhancement and consolidation of Islam - the expansion of its frontiers, the spreading of its message, the development of its social order. Two examples may suffice here.

The establishment of the towns and settlements (ribat) and the expansion and development of the old ones were carefully planned, in order to meet the economic demands of the caliphate, and, above all, to meet its defence and military requirements. ‘In the case of Sokoto, the building of ribats, the settling of nomads, the active encouragement given to immigration were practical measures which created a wide corridor of dense settlements and loyal population around the capital’, Saleh Abubakar explains. ‘These development made possible and sustained a high level of human activity associated with the expansion of human settlement, immigration, the expansion of the frontier of agricultural production and the emergence of Sokoto as tie busy focus of a wide-ranging system of local and regional political and commercial contacts’. Other settlements and neo-found cities followed similar patterns; they were established primarily as military outposts (ribat), and then through a deliberate planning, they were nurtured into commercial and economic centres, enjoying security and prosperity.

Another example of this Jihad oriented economic policy could be seen in land use. Lands were categorized in relation almost entirely to the

Jihad process. Thus, lands are classified into five. These, in the words of Shehu Abdullahi, in Ta'lim al-Radi, are as follows:

Land acquired by compulsion (i.e. force of arms), which cannot be sold or given away but it is to be retained for the benefit of the Muslims; land taken by peace treaties which is kept by its owners who can do what they like with it; land whose people embraced Islam while it was in their possession, and which belongs entirely to those people; land whose people fled (at the advance of Muslim forces), abandoning it, and this belongs to the Imam (i.e. state) who can deal with it according to his discretion; land whose owners have not accepted Islam and have not made peace (with the Muslims), and this the imam can grant to whoever he wishes.



Moreover, the granting of land for residential, commercial and industrial purposes are governed by the over-riding defence and welfare needs of the Islamic state. According to Shehu Abdullahi, all virgin lands near the centres of population can only be developed by Muslim; non—Muslims are not permitted to own or develop them. ‘But if the “dead” land is far away from the centres of population’, he says, ‘its cultivation is allowed to both Muslims and dhimis...’ The obvious consideration here is the security of the Muslim population and of the Islamic state.

Next to Jihad in importance as a source of economic development is, in Muhammad Bello’s estimation, trade, which, by implication, embraces industry. The Caliph stresses, in Ahkam al—Makasib, the fact that trade, according to the Prophet, secures ninety percent of all income, and then goes on to give reasons for placing trade in top—most priority, next only to Jihad. The benefits an income from trade come at all times, in all seasons, and through trade self-sufficiency could be attained. It may be said here that the Caliph went to great lengths in developing trade and inspiring commercial activities throughout the Caliphate. Professor Mahdi Adamu has made the point clear that while the Sokoto revolution destroyed almost all market

towns and adversely affected the existing trade routes in the region, 'almost simultaneously new commercial centres developed round the new centres of political power and the caravan routes were altered to follow the new changes'. The result was a rapid economic and commercial development all over the caliphate.

It is perhaps pertinent here to state that in Sokoto Caliphate the market, being the nerve centre of economic activities, occupies a central position in the scheme of things. The market was under the supervision of the Muhtasib, who, during the rule of Muhammad Bello, was not an ordinary official, but a senior Minister, who deputized for the Caliph whenever the latter was away from Sokoto. The Muhtasib's task was to preserve the Islamic social order - by ensuring economic stability, preserving the moral integrity of the state and promoting social justice in society. Shehu Abdullahi has elaborated in detail the functions of the Muhtasib in his Diya'ahl al-Ihtisab.

Shehu Usman wrote in Siraj al-Ikhwan that the Muhtasib is primarily responsible for safeguarding people's means of subsistence', and as such, it is his duty to supervise the market, adjust all the weighing apparatus of each district to conform to a single standard by ensuring

that the scales and the weights are just and that the weights are equal'. He equally has the responsibility to see that all measures, both big and small, are rectified so that they conform to a unified standard. Weights and

measures, according to Shehu Usman, must be perfect and devoid of any kind of trickery. If the market is thus so perfectly organised, the muhtasib then reserves the power in the words of Shehu Usman, 'to restrain in the most forceful way possible those who defraud and cheat, If anyone obtains wealth by these means (it should be taken from him and considered) revenue (fay') which the Commander of the Muslims may use for the benefit of the Muslim. The Muhtasib is also charged with the responsibility for quality control, elimination of riba in all trades, prevention of hoarding and middlemanship, price control and ensuring that the flow of goods and essential commodities to the market is not impeded by businessmen or any other persons.

Agriculture follows trade in Caliph Muhammad Bello's priority. The importance of agriculture, he says in Ahkam al—Makasib, lies in the fact that it is a means of building, energizing and clothing the human body and that it is a reliable source of income. It was the policy of the

Caliph, as Dr. Omar Bello has observed in his doctoral thesis, to locate new towns and settlements (ribats) along the rivers or fertile valleys, so as to give impetus and sound basis for agriculture. In certain instances, Dr. Bello further observes, the Caliph introduced irrigation schemes, especially in Sokoto- Rima river valleys to ensure year—round agricultural yields. Furthermore, ‘he taught the sugar cane farmers of Gidan Maikara, cane settlement, how to refine sugar and produce granulated brown sugar; the descendants of the original settlers still cherish the original tools and continued producing up to the Omar Bello writes. The Caliph also resettled nomads and undertook deliberate urbanization schemes aimed at large—scale human development base on trade and agriculture. The Caliph’s concept of human development and urbanization are set out in his al-Ribata wa’l Hirasa and his Dawab Shafin ila Muhammad al-Jaylani, which for reason of space are not considered in this paper. However, the thrust of his philosophy is worth noting. He said, as quoted by Professor Norris in The Tuaregs: Their Islamic Legacy and its Diffusion in the Sahel: ‘The concern of the Shari’a to promote community life is well known. Due to this jurists have ruled that it is lawful to transfer a foundling from the desert to the village and from

the latter to the town but not the opposite. Human perfection is not reached save through urbanization and civilization’.

The economic relationship between the individual citizen and the state under this system is that of mutual co-operation and interdependence. The individual is free and indeed actively encouraged to employ his skills, talents and energy in gainful occupation — trade, industry, agriculture, labour and any other effort — that may bring benefits to him and his society. But the interest of the individual is subordinate to the larger and more fundamental interest of the Muslim Umma. Consequently the ownership of all resources is ultimately vested in the Muslim Umma, with the individual having only usufruct rights to them. But his rights to the fruits of his labour are sacrosanct and inviolate.

Thus, in principle, all land which are acquired in the process of the revolution belong to the entire Umma, and cannot be owned individually, nor can any part of it be assigned to an individual for private ownership. It can only be assigned on a usufruct basis, which is also, in principle, nor heritable. This policy is stated by Caliph Muhammad Bello as follows, in al-Ghayth al-Wabl:

Other types of land such as those of the treasury, and fai and Kharaj cannot be granted for ownership (tamlik) because they are like permanent trust (al-awgaf al-mu'bid) for the welfare of the Muslims. The wagf cannot be granted for ownership by way of iqfa (state grant) or otherwise.

Furthermore:

... The assignment of (such types of land) in perpetuity to a man and then to his children and his posterity or offspring for as long as they survive is not permissible. Nor is it permissible to assign it as an endowment to an individual man, then to his children or his posterity or his offspring... for such endowment should be for the general welfare of the Muslim.



The same principle governs most, if not all, mineral resources: their ownership is vested in the Muslim Umma, and their exploitation and utilization must be governed by the general interest of the Umma, in which case the Imam, according to Muhammad Bello, ‘can enter into agreement with people concerning (their exploitation) according to what is lawful’. The general rules, in respect of mineral resources are stated by the Caliph in al-Ghayth al-Wabl as follows:

(The Imam) cannot assign them  
as a perpetual gift (to  
individuals) in the same way that  
he cannot assign conquered lands  
as a perpetual possession...

And the mine, whether it is a  
source of gold or Silver or base  
metal... the Imam has  
jurisdiction over it, according to  
the general consensus of  
opinion... in the case of gold  
mine or copper mine, the  
judgment is that it belongs to the  
Imam (i.e. the State)...And as for  
the rest of the mines such as  
antimony and salt and sulphur...it

is not lawful to assign them in fee  
(to individuals) under any  
circumstances but such mines  
should be shared among the  
people in general.

Moreover, the State is encouraged to establish a deliberate policy of helping and supporting the less privileged in society in their effort to improve their economic condition. A good example of this is the hima policy in which lands are, among other things, reserved specifically for the nurturing of the animals for zakat as well as the animal of the poor people who cannot go far in search of pasture and where hima is made in favour of the poor people, then all other categories of people, says the Caliph, must be excluded. This hima policy also prevents the government from reserving lands for the exclusive use of powerful people in society. According to Muhammad Bello, the Imam is not invested by the Shari'a with the authority:

to reserve all the fallow lands  
(or) to reserve any (such) place  
for his own private use or for the

a particular and exclusive use of  
some (influential) people.

### III CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we wish to reiterate four important points that emerge from the examination of the conception and practice of Sokoto Caliphate as far as its economic system was concerned. First, there is the notion that the establishment of economic justice is inseparable from the Islamic faith and way of life, so that a Muslim ruler is also a just ruler; and unjust ruler, who oppresses Muslims and usurps their property cannot strictly lay claim to Islam. Therefore, Islamic revolution, such as the one that occurred in Sokoto, as much for the purification of the faith as it was for the establishment, of socio-economic justice in society, and the overthrow of tyrants. ‘Whoever has it established against him’, Shehu Usman declares in Siraj al-Ikhwan, ‘that he has declared unlawful taxes to be lawful or (has pursued) any other like method of falsely devouring people’s wealth, must be judged to be an unbeliever. Similarly anyone who denies the Clear Truth and confounds it with falsehood’. To rise up in defence of justice and Truth in those circumstances, according to Shehu Usman, is perfectly justifiable.

In the second place, one of the principle functions of the state is to enhance the economic and social well-being of the people, not to

impoverish them, or strangle them economically. This implies that the State cannot set itself out to enrich itself at the expense of the people, by imposing taxes not sanctioned by the Shari'a on them. It implies also that the State should help the individual citizen to attain self-sufficiency and be self-reliant through trading, farming, labour or industry or any other lawful means of livelihood: the state will be better off if its citizens are less dependent on it. In short, the state is required to take from its citizens only those taxes which the Sharia permits.

No doubt the taxes are few, but for good reasons. One reason, as the experience of Sokoto shows, is that the lesser the taxes, the greater the incentive for economic activities and the opportunities for economic growth. 'One aspect of urban administration deserves mention...because it seemed to have been another crucial element in these (socio-economic) development: the fact that no taxes (other than Zakat...), tolls, or craft taxes were collected in Sokoto', Saleh Abubakar writes. 'It may... have been one of the policies aimed at encouraging industry and trade, and certainly favoured the emergence of the town as a major clearance and assemblage point in regional transactions'. Another reason is that prosperity and economic

development can never be achieved by building state treasury on illegal and unjust means. Prosperity comes when a state abides by the dictates of Allah. ‘For whoever leaves aside something (i.e. illegitimate taxation)’, to use al—Maghili’s words, ‘God will compensate him with something which is better; and what is with God is better and more lasting’. In short, if the state sub-ordinates itself to the rule of law and makes the well-being of its people its primary concern, and puts its trust in Allah as the ultimate Provider, it will eventually realize that justice is the surest means towards prosperity and fulfilment.

The third point we wish to raise in this conclusion is that in the Sokoto conception, a state must pursue a vigorous and, if need be, aggressive political economy if it is to attain self—reliance and all—embracing economic development. An aggressive defence policy aimed at securing one’s sovereignty — by which, in Sokoto, is meant the sovereignty, and integrity of Dar al-Islam and the supremacy of Islam over the land – is seen as a most vital policy towards ensuring the general well-being of the state. That is why Sokoto Caliphate grew, within just one to two decades, to be the strongest power in West

Africa, the super—nation dominating the economy and politics of the region.

Muhammad Bello himself set the example by undertaking no less than forty-seven battles, in his twenty year rule, in the cause of Islam. His purpose was no doubt to strengthen the Dar al-Islam and weaken the Dar al—Harb. The overall result of this deliberate policy, as Joseph Smaldone, who obviously is inclined to non-Muslims, complains in his Warfare in the Sokoto Caliphate, was that, 'Muslim territory - Dar al-Islam - was progressively enlarged by conquest, pacification and settlement. While the outlying regions - dar al-harb - were being depopulated and depleted of resources, the Muslim core territories were expanding, being re-populated, and developed'. As far as the Caliphate was concerned, the whole world belongs to Allah and is therefore a potential field for Islam to penetrate, control and develop. Barriers of race and geography cannot be accepted as sufficient a reason to hold back the spread of Islam, and the establishment of justice to nations and people who are being subjected to injustice and false rule.

The picture is of course, totally different today. We now have a generation of Muslim leaders all over this region who have not only,

thanks to colonialism, embraced their master's secular religion, but have also slavishly accepted the portion of Allah's otherwise wide and spacious earth allotted to them by the colonialists as their ultimate home. Having been nurtured in secular way of life, they have taken statecraft and government as no more than a license for self-aggrandizement self-enrichment, thus allowing themselves to be turned into armchair rulers, while those who know their own interests well ravage the country. Their purpose the, as Shehu Abdullahi describes similar rulers of his day, in Tazyin al-Waraqat:

is not the affairs of the mosques,  
nor the schools of learning, nor  
even the affairs of Qur'anic  
schools; but (their) purpose is the  
ruling of the countries and their  
people in order to obtain delight  
and acquire rank, according to  
the custom of the unbelievers,  
and the titles of their sovereignty.  
And the appointing of ignorant  
persons to the highest offices,  
and the collecting of concubines,  
and fine clothes and horses that



gallop in the towns, not on the  
battlefields...

What is more, such is the level of their moral sickness, fear and faintheartedness that they lack the courage even to cross the colonial boundaries, and , above all, they relentlessly pursue politics of subservience and economy of dependence.

Finally, we return to the theme that dominated the economic thinking and policies of Sokoto Caliphate - justice. Justice, in Sokoto, is seen as the ultimate guarantee of the security and stability of the state. ‘Justice’, Muhammad Bello states in al-Ghayth al-Wabl ‘is the foundation and source of sustenance of the world’ There can be no development, he says further, without justice. Therefore, he concludes, justice is the basis of all government. Shehu Usman states in Bayan Wujub al-Hijra: ‘Seeing to the welfare of subject is more effective than a large number of soldiers’. And, ‘a kingdom can endure (even) with unbelief but it cannot endure with injustice’. Abdullahi, on his part, states that, ‘the heavens and the earth are upheld by justice’, using the noble words of the Prophet, peace be upon him.

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